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SUBJECT: Austrian Muslim and Jewish Responses to Israeli Military
Action in Gaza

¶1. The Israeli military action in Gaza has triggered a controversy between the Austrian Jewish and Islamic communities due to their support for Israel and the Palestinians, respectively. In recent weeks, the Jewish Community (IKG) publicly lobbied for support of the Israeli military action, while the Islamic Community (IGGiOe) condemned the operation.

¶2. Both sides were engaged in staging demonstrations supporting or condemning the Gaza military action. The pro-Palestinian demonstrations were somewhat more radical in tone and were generally larger. The demonstrations were peaceful, and there have been no reports of the political conflict escalating into anti-Jewish or anti-Muslim violence as a result of the Gaza military operation.

¶3. The controversy peaked following a January 9 sermon by Imam Adnan Ibrahim in a main Vienna mosque in which the Imam reportedly called Israel "the real beast" and "criminal." "Hamas," on the other hand, "is defending us all," noted Adnan Ibrahim according to media reports.

¶4. Omar Al-Rawi, integration spokesman of the Islamic Community (IGGiOe), attributed Ibrahim's comments to the Imam's personal Gaza background, and the fact that he lost three relatives in the Gaza conflict. Moreover, noted Al-Rawi, expressions from Ibrahim's speech in Arabic may sound more emotional when translated. Jewish Community (IKG) President Ariel Muzicant demanded the imam's suspension from office, arguing that, "if a rabbi talked like that in a house of the Jewish community, he would lose his job within a second."

¶5. While the Muslim Green MP Alev Korun called up the IGGiOe to distance itself from Ibrahim, the IGGiOe tried to calm down the waves with a January 17 press release in which it expressed "solidarity with the suffering Gaza population," but emphasized that the Gaza conflict should not be imported into Austria, and should not affect the relations between IKG and IGGiOe. The Gaza conflict was "not a religious conflict", noted the IGGiOe.

Comment

¶6. The controversy harms the traditionally smooth relations between the IKG and the IGGiOe who have been engaged in a longstanding interreligious dialogue and cooperated well in areas of mutual interest, such as countering racism and promoting tolerance in Austria. With its January 17 statement, the IGGiOe seemingly attempts to invoke that spirit, appealing to the IKG to "agree that we do not agree," but to not import the conflict into Austria.
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